

**Notes of the Commissioners' Public Meeting with Councillors**  
**Wednesday, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2016**  
**Council Chamber, Town Hall, Rotherham**

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Present: Lead Commissioner Sir Derek Myers (Chair), Commissioners Julie Kenny, Mary Ney and Malcolm Newsam

Also in Attendance: The Mayor (Councillor Clark), Councillors Alam, Beaumont, Beck, Burton, Cowles, Ellis, Godfrey, Jepson, Jones, Khan, Lelliott, Reynolds, Roche, Rose, Sims, Julie Turner, John Turner, C. Vines, M. Vines, Wallis, Watson, Whelbourn, Whysall and Yasseen.

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Hoddinott, McNeely, Parker, Reeder and Wyatt.

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**1. WELCOME**

- 1.1 Lead Commissioner Sir Derek Myers welcomed everyone and re-stated that the purpose of this meeting is to allow the Commissioners to place in the public domain progress on their work and receive questions and/ or comments from Elected Members and the public.
- 1.2 The meeting is also an opportunity for the three political party Leaders to provide updates on their party's progress.
- 1.3 This will be the last meeting that takes place before the local elections and Commissioners will review future meeting arrangements thereafter.

**2. COMMISSIONERS' PROGRESS**

- 2.1 Commissioner Newsam reported on:
  - a) **Overall progress of the service** since the last Ofsted inspection and over the last 12 months where the Council has sustained significant areas of progress. There are no longer widespread failures in the service, all cases of children either vulnerable or at risk of harm are allocated and there are no untoward delays in children and families being assessed and receiving services.
  - b) **Capacity within Children's Services** and the significant strides the Council has made to strengthen the leadership

capacity within the service. There is now a permanent Head of Service tier and the Council is currently recruiting to the post of Deputy Director for Children's Services. The Council has also increased the number of social worker posts who now have much more manageable workloads.

- c) The management, leadership and governance of the service was recently commended by Ofsted following their recent improvement visit.
- d) The Council still remains too reliant on temporary managers and social workers which impacts on the sustainability of improvements and the overall quality and effectiveness of practice. The Chief Executive has agreed to enhance the HR and Finance functions of the service to help deal with this longstanding challenge.
- e) The **review of the residential sector** which has seen the closure of two residential care homes. Commissioning of provider services still remains underdeveloped.
- f) The **performance management system** which the service now has in place and is interrogated effectively by senior managers. The Council is strengthening its **quality assurance** arrangements which is already showing signs it is achieving better traction, although there is more work to be done.
- g) The robust **Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)** arrangements in place to protect children at risk of child sexual exploitation.
- h) The recent outcome of the **successful prosecutions following the trials into non-recent child sexual exploitation** which concluded on 26<sup>th</sup> February with six defendants found guilty. A number of commendations have also been received for the proactive approach that the Evolve team has taken to support witnesses and survivors.
- i) The ongoing role of the Council in **tackling child sexual exploitation** in Rotherham and the Council's involvement in two major operations involving the engagement of over 160 young people.
- j) The outstanding **victim management strategy** employed by the team which puts the Council at the forefront of how to tackle child sexual exploitation.

2.2 Further progress now needs to be made in making sure the Council develops the capacity to resume the executive responsibilities of Children's Services. The Secretary of State for the Department for

Education (DfE) is keen to see this progress over the next 6 months with a view to coming to a position by September 2016.

2.3 Commissioner Mary Ney reported on:

- a) **Taxi Licensing** and the number of case hearings that have taken place since the last Commissioners' public meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> January (6 hearings - 26 cases). The conclusion of the audit of all existing taxi drivers is expected by the end of March. Approximately 20 appeals to the Magistrates Court are outstanding and there are delays to some of these. The Council has not yet had a case which tests the core of the new Licensing Policy and will make sure it is able to present a robust case to the Magistrates Court if any appeals are made.
- b) **Variations to the Licensing Policy** and her recent decision to amend the policy in relation to the use of audio recording in licensed vehicles, and to change the effective implementation date from 6<sup>th</sup> January to 1<sup>st</sup> March for new applications following discussions with the Information Commissioner's Office in February. *The implementation date for taxi cameras to be installed for existing license holders is 6<sup>th</sup> July (depending on the age of vehicle and when the driver and vehicle licenses are due for renewal) and now 1<sup>st</sup> March for new applications.*
- c) The **variations to the policy regarding audio recording** are:
  - To remove the requirement for continuous audio recording between 10pm and 6am. The option for either the driver or the passenger to activate audio (and deactivate it once they have activated it) will continue to be available during that period;
  - To retain the requirement for the audio function to operate whenever an unaccompanied child or vulnerable person is in the vehicle at any time;
  - To amend the specification so that an indicator is displayed in the vehicle when the audio is active;
  - The ability to reset the audio feature (rather than it running for 15 minutes) when the passenger leaves the vehicle and before the next passenger enters.
- d) **Waste management** and her new Commissioner responsibilities for leading on this area (taking over the role from Commissioner Stella Manzie who has now left the Council).
- e) **Community Safety** and the recent arrival of Karen Hanson, newly appointed Assistant Director for Community Safety and Street Scene. Her key area will include community safety, licensing, enforcement and waste management.

#### 2.4 Commissioner Kenny reported on:

- a) The work undertaken over the last 12 months within her portfolio area outlined in the Commissioners' 12 Month progress review report and in her revised Commissioner working protocol.
- b) **Record of decisions** within her portfolio outlined in the Commissioners' 12 month progress report. Of the 25 decisions taken 18 are implemented or completed, 5 ongoing and 2 stalled with further work being undertaken to remedy the position.
- c) Work on the **Growth Plan**, Master Plan refresh and recent agreement of the draft Rotherham Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document by Cabinet.
- d) Ongoing work on Forge Island, Gulliver's' Family Theme Park and Rotherham College re: its final bid for a Higher Education Campus.
- e) Two recent achievements for Rotherham as winner of the Association of Town and City Management's annual awards for diverse mix of shops, and best large outdoor market award in the National Association of Borough Market Authorities awards.
- f) The launch of the new **Rotherham Together Partnership Plan** for 2016/17 taking place on 17<sup>th</sup> March and **Community Strategy** to be launched in March 2017. The next stage consultation phase will be to seek partners' strategic priorities for the next 3 to 5 years.
- g) The Business Growth Board and thematic sub-groups which meets regularly and continues to make good progress. There is a lot of engagement and activity taking place within the business community as they contribute to the town centre refresh, Growth Plan, skills and apprenticeships scheme and 'buy local, supply local'.
- h) The **Sheffield City Region** agenda and ongoing discussions on devolution.

#### 2.5 Commissioner Myers reported on:

- a) The **Council's budget** with £12m extra allocated to Children's Services and approval of a capital budget which will transform the look and feel of the borough over next few years.

- b) The position on the number of redundancies within the Council following the Commissioners' public meeting in January where Members sought clarification. 122 voluntary redundancies have now been approved, 42 have either left or are due to leave in circumstances of compulsory redundancy where the Council has closed the job and been unable to find suitable redeployment. These figures are not yet final given ongoing reviews in other service areas. This is less than 300 originally estimated and previously communicated.
- c) The eight senior staff appointments which now has four in post. The Strategic Director, Adult Care and Housing is an outstanding appointment with final interviews planned to take place on 18<sup>th</sup> April.

### **Recovery and Restoration**

2.6 Commissioner Myers also reported on:

- a) The **revised Directions** issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on 11<sup>th</sup> February which confirmed the return of a number functions to the Council (roughly one third of decisions).
- b) The decision of the **Secretary of State** who is not minded to agree at this point the return of licensing functions from the Council's AGM in May 2016 as recommended in his Commissioners' 12 month progress letter. The Secretary of State will give some further consideration after the all-out local elections and following the next Commissioners' progress report due on 11<sup>th</sup> May.
- c) The new governance model of decision-making that is now operating and restored Cabinet meetings which has now met on three occasions. There is a stronger version of scrutiny so that Councillor decisions can be scrutinised in a proper way.
- d) **Phase 3 of recovery and restoration** which will see Commissioners looking to return remaining executive powers back to the Council. The return of these powers will see a shift to a period of monitoring where Commissioners will continue to be present (as appointed by Government until 2019) to review, observe, study and attend meetings to ensure the Council is progressing as appropriate. During 2018 the final stage of intervention will involve an independent external inspection which will be comparable to the review undertaken by Louise Casey. To be led by someone wholly independent of the Commissioner Team and of the Council. Subject to outcome of this review this will then determine whether intervention ends in 2019 or recommend further next steps.

## **Elections**

- 2.7 Commissioner Myers emphasised the importance in ensuring good turnout at the all-out local elections on 5<sup>th</sup> May and will play his part in encouraging people to vote.
- 2.8 Commissioners thanked Members, officers and staff for their efforts over the last 12 months in helping to improve the Council.

### **3. QUESTIONS FROM ELECTED MEMBERS**

3.1 The following issues were raised by Members.

- a) The strengthening of the whole Council in safeguarding and broadening responsibility and ownership of Children's Services across the Council, and the Corporate Senior Leadership Team's role in ensuring this.
- b) The external review proposed at 2.6d for the final stage of intervention which is welcomed, and must be open, transparent and in the public interest.
- c) Recruitment and retention of permanent social workers and dealing with the long-standing challenge that the Council currently faces. The need to strengthen links with the nearby Universities and their careers centres to promote and attract young graduates.
- d) The national issue of child sexual exploitation which is taking place in other localities across the country yet Rotherham appears to be the only authority facing this type of intervention.
- e) The in depth piece of work undertaken by Scrutiny around waste and Streetpride which sets a good basis for future work. The agreement to appoint a 'Love my Street Co-ordinator' responsible for this area of work is welcomed and the Council now needs to ensure this becomes a main priority after the May local elections.
- f) Concerns regarding the investigations into South Yorkshire Police's handling of Rotherham child sexual exploitation matters and the number of police officers being investigated is of great concern, and the Council should write to the Independent Police Complaints Commission regarding this.

Commissioner Myers reported that Jason Harwin, Rotherham District Commander will soon be departing his post in Rotherham to take up the position of Assistance Chief Constable in South Yorkshire, with responsibility for local policing across the force area.

- g) The outcome of the recent governance review led by Professor Tony Crookes and the need to further consider the timing of Council meetings to take place in the evenings or varying times to encourage and enable wider public attendance.

3.2 Individual Commissioners responded as appropriate.

#### 4. **PARTY LEADERS - REPORT ON PROGRESS**

4.1 Each Party Leader provided an update on their progress:

4.2 **Cllr Read**, Leader of the Labour Group and Council updated on recent decisions of the joint Commissioner/Cabinet; work on monitoring and delivering the Council's Corporate 'Fresh Start' Improvement Plan which has completed 48% of its overall actions; work on partnerships and the upcoming launch of the Rotherham Partnership Plan priorities for 2016/17 (informed by last year's views from Rotherham consultation); ongoing discussions on devolution in the Sheffield City Region; Strategic Task Force on Tata which he continues to chair; progress on the arrival of the tram-train to Rotherham where he is in the process of writing formally to Network Rail regarding concerns on the delays to the project. He recorded thanks to the RiDO staff who are running the Resource Centre, set up to advise those at risk of redundancy from Tata Steel.

4.3 **Cllr Caven Vines**, Leader of the UKIP minority party reported on a conference he recently attended in Leeds aimed at reflecting on the lessons learned from Rotherham on child sexual exploitation. Louise Casey and Alexis Jay attended as key speakers. He raised concerns re: of lack of representation from the Council at this event and he will pursue the issue of potential 're-training for social workers' with Commissioner Newsam and Ian Thomas arising from discussions at the conference. He wishes to be kept regularly briefed on progress regarding devolution arrangements in Sheffield City Region.

4.4 **Cllr Martyn Parker**, Leader of the Rotherham Independents' Group was not in attendance to update on progress.

#### 5. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

5.1 Two Members of the public asked questions and raised the following:

- a) Lead Commissioner's fees and register of interest.
- b) Progression regarding a longstanding unresolved issue with the Council by Mr Brian Cutts.

**Action: Commissioner Myers will take a fresh look and review this issue.**

5.2 Commissioner Myers responded as appropriate.

**6. FUTURE MEETINGS**

6.1 There will be no meeting in advance of the local elections and Commissioners will review any further meeting arrangements thereafter, giving sufficient notice to Members and the public of any future meetings.